

A LEISURE HOUR'S READING

DENIS.
A ROMANCE.
CHAPTER II.

(Continued from last week's issue.)
There was a moment's almost involuntary pause, and then, not meeting the glad young eyes turned on him, "Mr. Halliwell?" said the stranger, interrogatively.
"You wish to see me?" the quick boyish tones questioned.

And on receiving a reply in the affirmative, the two turned away together in the direction of the lawn and its overshadowing cedar, the impatient, eager steps of Vincent Halliwell striving to keep pace with the slow feet of his companion.

Fully two minutes later the door of the sitting-room was slowly opened, and Vincent Halliwell, standing on the threshold, saw, as Robert Jardyne had done, the white figure in the flame of sunlight.

But the brilliancy all around seemed to mock at the despairing, drooping head, at the falling frown, and nothing all this, it was with a cry of pain that he flung himself on his knees beside her, kissing the white gown and slender hands.

"Ah, my darling, do not despair! Lift your head and speak to me."

And as she did not move, "Look at me!" he cried vehemently. "Do you think that I am going to give you up? Why, if every obstacle earth contains lay between us, my love would eventually conquer, and I should win you."

She raised her head then, but it was only to say, unheeding of his tender, eager words, "Why have you come?" Oh, clasping her hands, "I cannot bear it! I cannot. Life is too hard—always has been too hard—for me. But, her voice sinking, "I am conquered now. I have no courage left."

"No, no, Denis, you are too brave a woman for that," rising and facing the room, "It is but a little more you will have to bear, and then you will be mine to protect. For you love me," pausing, and placing two strong hands on her shoulders, "Yes," looking into the miserable, upraised eyes, "true as truth. Whatever else may change, your love never will. It is mine forever."

"Forever, Vin, forever," passionately, lifting her hands impudently, and then a faint color burning into her cheeks. "But love will not set things straight; love will not help us to say good-bye. The courage I have been gathering so hardily these last two hours is all departing. Do not try too far. For old times' sake," taking his hand in her two slender, burning ones, "for old times' sake, kiss me once and wish me well, and then go—pass out of my life forever."

"Denis," he cried hoarsely, of a sudden, "I seem to me to have spoiled your life for you. What can I pray for you? I think, dear, the kindest prayer I can pray is that God will be very good to you, and teach you to forget."

And as he would have interrupted, "No, Vin, I do not mean anything unkind, though just now, perhaps, it may sound so; but life is not given us just to lament in. And you are so young and strong, and have so much to do with your life that you will be brave, will you not?"

"Thank you, Denis," lifting her hand to his lips. "For your sake I will be brave, and—I will wait!" and so turned away through the rays of the sunlight into the cold world, which for him lay beyond the reach of Denis Jardyne's smiles.

(To be continued.)

But she added nothing further, did not strive to check him, as his cheeks flushing, his words coming faster in his excitement, he told her that the law was her only remedy. That the bar of the law once placed between her and the man who had ruined her happiness, her life would be her own, to do what she would with.

"In the meantime," he went on, "I will wait. I will go abroad, never see you—it will only be for a year—it is not so very long, for we can trust each other; and, oh, my love, his voice falling, "you are well worth waiting for."

She heard him in perfect silence—not one interruption did she offer; but there was something more chilling, more hopeless, in the stillness and gravity than there would have been in the most outspoken condemnation.

And so Vincent Halliwell felt though even to himself he would not acknowledge it. He knew that the quiet voice was going to say, even before the low tones fell on his ear.

"No, Vin, I could not. You know it, even while you are saying it. Do you not?" tenderly, as he made no reply, "No law can undo the past. It can give me freedom," as he would have interrupted, "but that I have. He has promised never to return. And if he keeps his word, I ask nothing more from life. So much hold my past has upon me, that I could not bear to have his name—my name, a little bitterly—" dragged through the mists, "and as for the rest, well, I must let it go."

"But you shall not," he cried impetuously. "If you have no thought for yourself—if, passionately, "you do not care for yourself, all the same you must think of me. I," his voice faltering, "cannot let it go."

"And do you think it costs me nothing to say so? I speak calmly, because when two hours ago that door opened, and I saw him standing on the threshold, then died. Then all happy things of my life, and I suffered all I could suffer. Ah, poor Vin, poor Vin!" her calmness of a sudden leaving her, and the tears filling her eyes, "I cannot bear it! Something always told me I was not to enjoy such happiness."

But even yet Vincent Halliwell could not believe her, could not comprehend that his will would not eventually conquer hers, more especially as her love was fighting on his side; but his passion and eloquence were all unavailing; she could only implore of him to leave her, to shorten these bitter moments, leaving her forever the memory of his love, as which her heart would live.

"If, her voice faltering, "they should never meet again."

The agony of her voice and eyes, touched him, and he stood silent before her, noting as in a dream the soft brown of the hair, the sweet, tearful eyes—which strove not to meet his—and the other beauties of the slender white-robed figure, which only that morning he had thought would so soon pass into his keeping forever.

And with that thought, with the remembrance that he was giving it all up—or rather that it had of a sudden passed beyond his grasp—he flung himself on his knees, and with his face hidden in her knees, and with his hand on her lap, he burst into tears.

She felt those burning tears with what a pang, who can say? but no word escaped her; though presently, as he did not move, she with her left hand, on which an opal ring—his ring—shimmered, gently smoothed his ruffled hair curls with a tender, caressing movement.

At length—"You have conquered," he said, not looking up. "When you speak to me, and pray me to go, I can do nothing but obey you, though it is to my own misery—and I believe, too, yours. But," raising his head, "should you ever repeat, you swear you will let me know?" Denis, passionately taking her hand in his, "swear to me that the very moment you learn you are free, you will send for me. Be it to-morrow or twenty years hence—let me be in England, or hundreds of miles away—write me the one word 'come,' and as swiftly as I can be by your side, so swiftly may you count upon me."

"I swear it, Vin," she answered, low, her hand in his. "And if you do not counsel will forgive you, and if you do—ah—" breaking off, "say good-bye, I cannot bear it!"

"It is only at your bidding that I say it at all," he said. "Unsay your words even now. Consider—for my sake, for your own sake."

But she only shook her head impatiently, her lips growing white as the while. And his young eagerness seemed destroyed by the chilling hopelessness of her looks. He said nothing, but with a sudden movement he took her in his arms and kissed the white lips and cheeks with such passion that she shrank away terrified.

"That is my good-bye," he said hoarsely. "Good-bye, my love, my promised wife; we are young, we can afford to wait. I will live on the thought of that."

At the door he paused irresolutely, then returned once more to her side.

"Say something to me," he said, "something to comfort me."

She half stretched out her hands as the miserable words fell on her ear, but then, as if remembering all that lay between them, clasped them tightly together.

"What can I say, Vin?" she began. "It seems to me I have spoiled your life for you. What can I pray for you? I think, dear, the kindest prayer I can pray is that God will be very good to you, and teach you to forget."

And as he would have interrupted, "No, Vin, I do not mean anything unkind, though just now, perhaps, it may sound so; but life is not given us just to lament in. And you are so young and strong, and have so much to do with your life that you will be brave, will you not?"

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